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AUTHOR Lee, Johnny
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ABSTRACT

The experiences found in adventure programs often parallel the archetypes depicted in mythological quests. Drawing on the work of Joseph Campbell, the stages and trials of adventure participants are compared to similar rites of passage and epic adventures experienced by heroes and heroines in epic literature and mythology. The basic pattern of separation, time of trials, and return to community in heroic adventures is reinterpreted in terms of the adventure program as leaving a safe place (home, school, community) to face strange trials (weather, getting lost, group conflicts, anaphylactic shock) and returning home with a sense of personal growth (maturity and confidence). The role of the outdoor leader is similar to the guide in epic adventures who shows the way; gives instruction, tools, and encouragement; and allows the hero to accomplish his goals by himself. Activities may be framed in this context by using rituals, sharing stories and experiences, recognizing accomplishments and achievements, saying farewell to other participants, recognizing the transition, and using tokens. However, there are certain difficulties and even dangers in considering expeditions as mythical quests or rites of passage. Adventure programs should not go overboard and emulate the spiritual references and rituals of other cultures that have been in existence for generations, or claim that they can enact a rite of passage. (SAS)

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OUTDOOR ADVENTURE PROGRAMS
FULFILLING HEROIC ARCHETYPAL PATTERNS

By

Johnny Lee
Albuquerque, NM
(505)248-1043

ABSTRACT: Experiences found in adventure programs and expeditions often emulate the archetypes depicted in myths and stories from around the world. As noted by literary and psychological researchers such as Joseph Campbell, participants go through stages and trials similar to the heroes and heroines of old. An understanding of this pattern and using certain methods such as ritual and story-telling give adventure experiences a deeper, more profound relevance to participants.

He was cut off from his family and all that he knew. With strange companions, he was led by a mysterious figure who was taking them into unknown areas of unsurmountable perils. The guide had given them gentle encouragement, a few interesting tools and an uncertain goal. They fought with each other occasionally but pulled together when the going got tough and achieved their goal. Afterwards, he was not the same person. The trials he faced and the revelations that he experienced brought him closer to his own true identity. Does this sound like a student's or perhaps even your own experience on a wilderness expedition? Well, it is also the basic plot line of Luke Skywalker's adventure in *Star Wars*. In fact, it is the basic pattern of all epic adventures that date back to prehistoric times. Joseph Campbell's renown work on archetypal figures and adventures, especially in his *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, details a pattern in the mythical tales of heroes' and heroines' cyclical journey through dangers and challenge to achieve rewards and personal growth (Campbell, 1968). This same pattern is the basic format of 'rites of passage' rituals which are universally followed around the world and through history. To quote:

"The so called rites of passage. . . , are distinguished by

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formal and often severe, exercises of severance, where by the mind is radically cut away form the attitudes , attachments and life patterns of the stage left behind. Then follows an interval of more or less retirement, during which enacted rituals designed to introduce the life adventurer to the forms and proper feelings of his new estate, so that when, at last, the time is ripened for the return to the normal world , the initiate will be as good as reborn"(Campbell, 1968).

So what? How does this relate to outdoor-adventure recreational and educational programs? First, let us look at the current rites of passage that are offered to most of our youth today. Perhaps the most anticipated but least value forming is achieved just by reaching 16 years and taking a simple driving test(Finn, 1993). A more entertaining ceremony is enacted at the end of public education with a celebratory prom (Hernandez, 1993). But are these transitions points that prepare a person for the responsibilities of an adult? Even unformalized initiations into the world of drinking and drugs or the onset of sexual relations are often recognized as rites of passage. Granted, there are contemporary societies and cultures that consciously enact and perform ceremonial and intense rites of passages for thousands of youth every year but what are the values and the self concept created by initiation into most gangs or collegiate GREEK clubs(Williams,1992)?

In the outdoor adventure profession, we have the opportunity to provide an experience that can be retold very much like the figures found in Greek or Native American mythology. This is not so much a manual explaining how to create a rite of passage but more of a comparative study which can provide a backdrop for outdoor leaders to consider the roles of guide and students and the archetypal pattern of the experience. With this approach in mind, certain practices and models can be used (or even realized that they are being used) to make a more a participant's experience more meaningful and impactful.

The outline of a hero's quest found in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* can be laid over the common experience of adventure programs, especially expeditions. At it's simplest level, there is separation, a time of trials and finally the return but now as a hero or heroine. Joseph Campbell gives a more detailed account, first describing the "call to adventure" in which the central figure is summoned or compelled from his or her homeland to go into

the unknown. All that is familiar to them and even their very identity is lost. On a grand scale, this is the Buddha leaving his palace behind and forsaking his princly title. But it is no errant wandering or tourist trip; there is a goal in mind, a vision to enact, a Golden Fleece to obtain. Essentially, people on the onset of an expedition experience the same separation. Behavior and skills previously used to get through the day are useless and new ones must be acquired. This is the point where a herald or guide comes into the picture. Sometimes they may first appear to be the antagonist, placing the unwilling character on the journey and sometimes they are a friend who provides special gifts to aid the adventurer but more often, they are mix of both. This is where the role of the outdoor leader is characterized. They are 'from' the environment where the adventure takes place, having the knowledge, familiarity and tools needed to survive. Just as Perseus was given a mirrored shield to save him from the dreaded glare of the Medusa, guides give protective clothing, gear and teach the skills necessary to survive in the wilderness. Another a Greek hero, Theseus was given string by Adriane to help him find his way out of the Labyrinth, just as instructors give a map and compass to the group and show them how to use it.

Now the initiate is ready to enter the "zone of magnified power". Here, the world is entirely strange and reputed to be dangerous. This is the stage where the hero must strive to achieve victory, against challenge and with himself. In Norse myth, Thor and Loki enter the hostile and terrible Jotuenhiem, land of Giants; for outdoor programs, it is the trail head or even the ropes course grounds. Especially for populations that have never associated with the wilderness environment before, this is a true threshold into a world of exaggerated dangers (rabid Grizzlies and *Deliverance* bogeymen) and more real, unknown problems (group struggles and confrontation with own deficiencies). This is the most exciting part of mythological tales: the tests of Hercules, the monsters encountered by Jason and Odysseus, and the trials faced by the Sumerian goddess, Inanna as she entered the underworld. While the challenges faced by the members of an expedition are not as fantastic, they can be just as difficult. For the outdoor adventurer, weather, getting lost, group conflicts and anaphalaxic shock are the modern day monsters that must be overcome to finish the trip or even to just survive. Two types of trials in particular, the grand challenge and the suspended period are central experiences and will be discussed later.

Finally, there is the return home which few outdoor leaders ever get to witness. Now, the wanderer comes back as a hero or heroine with the treasures to benefit his community. Theseus returns to Thebes to be king and a girl comes home from a semester course, a woman. A key element in this return is that the personal growth of the prodigal son or daughter now serves their community. The maturity and confidence obtained on the journey improves the relationships with their friends and family.

Understanding this pattern and the relationship of modern adventure expeditions to the mythical heroic journeys of old gives a deeper and more dramatic impact to the processing and appreciation of such programs. As a member of an expedition, the hardships faced are reduced by viewing one's role in terms of a larger picture, the continuation of an adventurer's quest for honor and reward. As a guide, it gives a different view for what is happening to the students and another means of framing activities. However, there are specific methods that compliment this approach. Mainly, the conscious use of ritual, the sharing of stories and understanding the archetypal role of the guide are focus points that instructors can develop to enhance the student's experience. Playing with them and finding what is comfortable and effective for each leader is an on going process that develops over time and must be adapted for each program population and goal.

To fully appreciate what the use of ritual means, we must broaden it's references. It could be the dramatic use of ceremony as found in Catholic Mass or the Native American's pipe smoking ritual but it can also stand for the habits and behaviors of the group that become the norm. This refers to the way we wake up, serve food, and say good night. Often on long expeditions there is a particular pattern followed that may never have been expressly stated such as cooks always being last to be served. Other rituals have a ceremonial aspect and intend to be poignant; such as the end of a program when it is time to part. Rituals are effective at transitions and at other key points in a trip or program, allowing people to recognize the importance of the occasion. At the beginning of the trip, taking time to say goodbye to their previous 'life' prepares participants for their experience. This can be writing a letter home or giving a gift or token to those left behind or by even literally saying goodbye to their things. During the trip, ceremonies help participants realize and reflect on key parts of the expedition, cementing their impressions of it. When passing a landmark or entering a new

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experience.

Two rituals in particular, familiar to most programs, are often the most poignant and memorable. One is a final, climatic achievement of an expedition such as reaching the mountain peak. The other is quieter, less physical but just as impactful emotionally, mentally and spiritually: the solo period. Relating the former ritual to myth, the physical challenge of the ascent and the potential danger of rock slides and exposure reflects the challenge of a knight slaying a dragon. Even though it is the muscle and nerves that accomplish the goal, the body needs the will power and conviction to reach the top. Indeed, it is not so much the altitude and fatigue that must be overcome but it is the fear and self-doubt that is faced head on. In reaching your personal limits, a great sense of power and enhancement is felt by reaching untapped inner-strength resources. The stress and hardships faced give the validity to the experience as a transformation point in a person's life. Just as impactful is the reflective, time-out period known as solo. Many comparisons have been made to Native vision quests but perhaps this ritual can be recognized in every religion. Jesus was in the desert for forty days, the Buddha sat under the Bo tree and the Norse God Odin hung on the cross. The pattern is the same: there is a rejection of sensory input, even of basic bodily needs such as sleep and food. The participant is faced with their own situations, values, goals and desires, in essence, themselves. The result sometimes is a transformation, a wider, more universal, altruistic perspective. "Ego is not annihilated in them; rather, it is enlarged; instead of thinking only of himself, the individual is dedicated to the whole of his society" (Campbell, 1968). This is the basic service ethic found in Outward Bound programs. Indeed, it was one of Kurt Hahn's primary goals to instill a sense of compassion in his graduates. Not that Outward Bound students become world saviors but that the focus of the expedition is not reaching the end but creating a cohesive, effective team (HIOBS, 1992). Perhaps through the shared hardships of miles, cold and hunger, people gain a sense of empathy that is truly sincere in the wilderness.

Finally, the end of the expedition is perhaps the most appropriate and has the greatest need for ritual. Time is taken to recognize their accomplishment and to mention honors. Drastically important, saying farewell to people with whom deep bonds were formed eases the bereavement of the separation. Thirdly, recognizing the transition prepares them for their

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terrain, a ritual can have a memorable effect. Carrying a rock up a mountain to add it to the cairn along the ridge or singing a certain song at trying points on the trail are just two examples. The population of the students and the sincerity of the instructors determine how 'corny' a ceremony may feel. Basically, the first few rituals may not be taken as seriously by some students but repetition has the effect of ingraining it into their habits. It is the strength of the community, whether that be the whole program (department, school, company) and it's traditions or just the nucleus of the expedition members themselves that creates the culture which gives birth and structure to rituals. There are several rituals used on expeditions that are familiar to most programs. One is the chow circle; before eating, members hold hands, communicate any information or feelings, and have a moment of silence while a 'pulse' is passed around by squeezing hands. All tasks and problems are put on hold and a deep sense of community is engendered. Indeed, a sense of fellowship is a primary root in performance of rituals. Another ritual is the use of the talking stick.(Adams, 1987) It may be just a stick but it has the wonderful power of stopping interruptions and to help focus on listening. Often, whatever stick nearby can work but when students take the time to decorate the stick (with whatever natural resources they find) and bother to carry it with them from campsite to campsite, it gains added significance. Again, it is the time taken, the resources used, and attitude that give any ritual it's power.

As a final example, rituals can sometimes be spontaneous and unstructured. There is an account from one Outward Bound instructor that occurred late into his expedition. One night, around the campfire, the students (and instructors) became rather rambunctious; they tied feathers in their hair, smeared ash and mud on their bodies and faces and began to dance around, howling at the night sky. This was by no means a planned activity but rather a sudden outburst of just cutting loose and having fun. Joseph Campbell may relate the Greek God Pan's effect on shepherds and maidens to the subliminal need for the unconscious to get in touch with it's wild side but however that may be, the night had a deep impact on their experience and became a turning point in the group's cohesion. There are dozens of activities, ranging from reading quotes to telling riddles that ritualize experience. These smaller rituals have a strong impact on the continuity and structure of a course but there are certain ones that stand out as key points in the student's

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future challenges. Often a token is given, either a diploma, pin or other such item. In some cultures, a permanent mark such as a tattoo or piercing is made symbolizing the transition. Whatever it may be, a physical reminder with it's ceremonial awarding, can contain all the memories and lessons of the expedition.

Before leaving the subject of ritual, a related factor is the sense of place. There are certain areas that have an invested sense of importance either by it's aesthetics quality, difficulty in reaching or it's previous history. Joseph Campbell speaks of the World Navel, an area where special powers reside and can give blessings to it's visitors (Campbell, 1968). The entire expedition focus of reaching a summit point not only makes the accomplishment deeply significant but also turns the peak into a center of personal importance. This is King Author's Avalon, the crusader's Jerusalem and Thoreau's Walden Pond. Similarly, geopity is a concept developed by Yi Fu Tuan.(Raffan, 1993) Simply put, certain areas are imbued with special significance by people's actions and belief. These ideas are not so foreign to any outdoor enthusiast, most of whom know of a certain place that has special meaning, where thoughts are quelled and a sense of peace prevails. Any solo site where someone stays for several days becomes deeply imbedded in the soloist's memory. For programs with an environmental focus, asking students to find areas that feel special to them is one the best ways of creating a relationship between the participants and the natural world.

Another method that enhances the student's experience as a mythical quest is relating the myths themselves. This can be a dramatic narration around a campfire or it can be as simple as talking about a movie at a rest stop. The effect, to varying degree, is the same. It places the student in the framework of the protagonist facing tremendous challenges for the ultimate reward. "An individual can get in touch with his or her felt emotions through those of the characters presented. The listener is no longer alone, but integrated into a continuum of humanity stretching over millenniums through archetypes of character, emotions and patterns" (Leonard, 1990). Basically, the listener sees him or her self as the characters that face similar challenges. It may not be demons or giants that they face but their fear of the elements, of losing direction and not being liked by other members of the group is the same. In telling stories, the students perceive their experience as a story as well. "Our lives are literally a story unfolding...

Good stories, well told, can help internalize messages like: have courage, take action, take responsibility, you are worthwhile, treat others with love" (Leonard, 1990).

Finally, it is not so important to use ancient myths. Reciting exotic tales increases their knowledge of other cultures but especially with younger populations, stories that they are familiar with may be more easy to relate to their own experience. As Joseph Campbell states over and over, it doesn't matter what time period or people a tale comes from, all stories are essentially the same. For example, the beginning sequence of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* is similar to the elements faced in a ropes course. "Indiana Jones went through all those obstacles to get the golden head. What are you reaching for at the end of this ropes course?" Perhaps this framing makes the participant think about why they are facing their fears or maybe it just gives them the confidence by envisioning themselves as the whip wielding hero. Either way, it may help them get to the end.

Perhaps the most useful and difficult to grasp lesson in relating adventure activities to the mythical quests is understanding the role of the guide. The job, the position and duties are as old as the stories themselves. For every hero on quest, there was someone who showed them the way. Consider the character of the wise old man: Merlin, Gandalf and Obi Wan Kenobi. They are never the main characters but play a significant role in providing guidance, skills and tools and sometimes protection. With the ability and experience that guides should have, it is difficult to not lead the way and solve every problem. Similar to Lao Tzu's philosophy on leadership, a guide provides the opportunity for the students to accomplish their goals themselves. That way, the final victory is not reaching the mountain peak but finding the courage and resources within to get there. Another clue that can be gained from the tales is to understand how the guides regard their charges. Even if the heroes first come to them as weaklings, idiots or cowards, they treat them like the champions they will become. During the hardships and trials, students may behave less than admirably. It is important not to place the behavior on the person but to treat it separatly, still respecting the individual. This increases their self-esteem which prevents such behaviors from occurring.

There are certain difficulties and even dangers in considering expeditions as mythical quests or rites of passage. In creating the group's

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"culture", it is important not to 'steal' from another's. It is very popular to use Native American ceremony and totems in many adventure education and therapy programs. This has been widely criticized by the fact that one cannot understand the spiritual references and deeper meanings of a ritual unless brought up in that culture (Horwood,1994; Hall, 1992; Oles, 1992). But rituals can be created with imagination and keen perception of what is going on around you. Spending a couple of weeks with the same people develops a society whereas activities, totems and habits are observed and respected. Many programs have traditions that are followed reverently such as the Outward Bound pin ceremony for graduates who have done extremely well. However, the ceremonies and rituals of religions and nations have been in existence for generations beyond counting. Claiming that a program can enact a rite of passage can hazard an important transition in a person's life. There is the danger of going overboard. The extent of the community and the specifics of the ritual can have a deep influence of the stressed and vulnerable spirits of expedition members, especially young ones. Above all, do not form a cult. The leaders of adventure and expedition programs are responsible for more than the physical aspect of their students. Offering official initiation into adulthood and improper use of ritual are signs of poor judgement which no outdoor leader should posses. But proper, sincere development of methods and honoring the spirit of the adventurer in students can give special meaning and flavor to an expedition. So bring a book of your favorite stories, build shrines on your next trip and see what adventures can reoccur from the River Styx to the Rio Grand.

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